



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Statement for Delivery  
*Health Care Parity for Puerto Rico*  
2456 Rayburn House Office Building  
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Thank you all for coming.

We are here this morning to discuss an issue of the highest moral and practical importance: the right of the four million U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico to participate fully and equally in our nation's healthcare system. I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to those individuals and organizations who are fighting hard to make this right a reality.

Puerto Rico participates in the programs that will form the foundation of the reform package currently being debated here in Congress. But, like our sister U.S. territories, we participate at a significant disadvantage.

With respect to Medicaid, Puerto Rico is subject to a cap that limits the amount the federal government can contribute to the Island's Medicaid program each year. No such cap applies in the 50 states. Since Puerto Rico's cap is set so low, the actual federal contribution hovers around 20%, leaving the government of Puerto Rico responsible for the remainder. By contrast, the minimum federal contribution provided to any state is 50%, and Medicaid programs in the poorest states can receive more than 75% in federal funding. This unequal funding causes severe harm to patient care in Puerto Rico and to the local government's finances.

Under Medicare, Puerto Rico is also treated in less-than-equal fashion relative to the 50 states. For example: ill-designed federal formulas result in Puerto Rico hospitals receiving lower reimbursement payments than their counterparts in the states. It should be noted that residents of Puerto Rico, like their fellow citizens in the states, pay the federal taxes that fund major portions of the Medicare program.

These disparities were never fair or acceptable. But the arguments in favor of their elimination, on both moral and public policy grounds, have never been more compelling than they are right now, as this Congress debates legislation designed to provide equal access to quality health care for all Americans, whatever their financial means and wherever they reside.

There are important voices supporting this cause. Last January, then President-Elect Obama sent a letter to Governor Fortuño in which he pledged to seek "equal coverage of Puerto Rico in health care assistance programs." Honoring this pledge, the Obama Administration is currently engaged in the effort to obtain equal coverage for Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories. We are grateful to the President for his dedication to this important principle.

I also want to recognize our colleagues in Congress that are working with us to achieve parity, especially Chairman Rangel and Senator Dodd. Largely because of the Chairman's leadership, the House discussion draft contains a major increase in federal Medicaid funding, which will bring Puerto Rico much closer to parity. Senator Dodd's bill fully includes Puerto Rico in the healthcare exchange, and we are grateful for his leadership. Senators Schumer, Menendez, and Bill Nelson have also been very supportive.

It is now my pleasure to introduce my great friend, Governor Luis Fortuño. In his current capacity as governor, before that as Resident Commissioner, and indeed over his entire career, Governor Fortuño has fought tirelessly for fair treatment for the people of Puerto Rico.